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AUTHOR Edwards, Nancy
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ABSTRACT

As student college placement and achievement scores continue to evidence a decline in reading, verbal ability, and mathematics competency, it becomes necessary for public educational institutions to recognize the need to re-establish the mission to teach in the area of academic competencies and scholarship, and to diminish the role of surrogate nuclear family. Families, likewise, must re-define their goals as support systems, and parents and educators must create a common bond of communicated ideas in order for learning to succeed. (MB)

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THE NEW ACCOUNTABILITY REACHES TO THE FAMILY

By Nancy Edwards

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THE NEW ACCOUNTABILITY REACHES TO THE FAMILY

Recently a dean of instruction commented that he could understand why some schools today were having difficulty in reaching and motivating students. After all, he surmised, he was not at all sure that academia's function was to serve all the needs of all students ranging from academic preparation to proper nutrition. It has become recognizable then that the public schools have been attempting to serve as both nuclear family and prime educator.

Few would disagree that the school has every obligation and right to act as the latter function: prime educator in a society committed to educational opportunity for every citizen. We have every reason to be dedicated to this concept and to take pride in its role in the free world. But there is reason to have concern that the public schools have begun to take on impossible tasks, thus diffusing their academic roles of training and preparing students for scholarly pursuits.

In curriculum committees today, it is common to review lists of reasons why students are scoring significantly lower on senior placement tests, such as the Scholastic Aptitude Tests (SAT) administered to high school seniors and used as guides to college acceptance. Committees must face squarely

the issues of why students' test behavior evidences significantly less competency in reading, verbal ability and mathematics than students of similar age and academic preparation a decade ago. There can be no mistaking the downward curve of performance delineating test performance behavior since the Sputnik era when students reached a performance peak. A decade ago students who scored low on college entrance examinations would have been turned away from colleges and universities; today because their sheer numbers include to top 10% of many high school semior classes, they are assigned classes in remedial compensatory programs. It is of extreme concern and urgency for educators to look upon what may be the most serious lack of competency in basic skills preparation among the educable in the history of the twentieth century. We cannot ignore reports that high school valedictorians are falling short of admission standards for colleges, that honor students are being denied places in professional schools, and that students are seeking extra courses, tutors, and summer programs to make up for what they should have learned in their regular courses.

A number of reasons for this failure to perform well only sustains on point: the schools in public education cannot take on the role of families any longer. Public schools have tried to carry out the functions of the family by providing warm and interested adult figures and meaningful social environments for each child. There is no denying the necessity

of social intervention and supplementary care for many otherwise deprived students, but the services are reduced elsewhere; teachers are caught in the emotional and moral dilemmas which belong properly to families. Issues of food, clothing, illness, suicide, drugs, parental custody, and divorces have been turned away from facilies and brought to classrooms as priority items which must be attended to before a learning environment can be established. Families must come forward and assist in the care of their children and work with educators to properly instill competencies. Educators must call for an end to parent apathy and an end to diffusing their roles as instructors and academicians because of impossible demands placed upon them to serve as parent surrogates and family support systems.

Margaret Mead cites the decline of the significant coring of the family as a chief detractor to stability in society. When the family fails, its children may fail as well to cope with the world at large. Hence, there is no immediate place to shelter these children than public schools. A teacher is often asked to compensate for so many areas of students' neglect or rejection ranging from poor health, poor nutrition to overt neglect or abuse. The improvements or changes should begin with the family and within the home, rather than outside the home as a separate entity.

For many children there is little continuity between values expressed in the home and values set forth in school.

Children are being asked at school to inculcate values which often do not meet with parental recognition and to perform tasks which may not be communicated to parents as desirable ones. For example, a seventh grader may be asked to read a novel about a child who seeks his own identity (Dibs: A Child in Search of Self). If his parents do not share in this experience, the child must rely completely on his teachers and classmates for feedback of his interpretations. A common bond of communicated ideas must be established and expressed in order for learning to succeed. Learning may not be derived from the same texts as parents used, thus the new material needs to be introduced to the family for acceptance and optimum learning to occur. Families need to be assured that learning occurs outside of the classroom as well as within and that they play a significant role in establishing successful learning patterns and in reinforcing the learning process.

Competency levels can be increased and performance levels can be turned around to be more representative of intelligence and ability. But it is not going to be easy, nor will it be rapid. Public education must re-establish its mission to teach in the area of academic competencies and scholarship. Families must re-define their goals as support systems. Parents and educators and students must keep lines

of communication open so that problems are assessed and solutions are offered in cooperative efforts before impasses are created. The potential of the mind is beyond limit, beyond measurement. To ignore that fact, to fail to participate in its journey toward fulfillment is to travel a disaster course which deprives each generation of its heritage and destiny.

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